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EDWARD MACDOWELL

**EDWARD
MACDOWELL**
BY LAWRENCE GILMAN



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PREFACE

THE difficulty of achieving a just appraisal of the work of an artist whose activity is, in any sense of the word, contemporary, finds recognition in a conviction which has crystalised almost into a truism. When the subject of such a critical endeavour is not alone a product of one's own time, but of one's own country as well, the embarrassment of the situation becomes acute. The difficulty, for any considerate and balanced observer, does not lie so much in the possibility of over-valuation as in the danger of a too-cautious and grudging attitude toward excellences which, in other circumstances, would be unhesitatingly acknowledged. That, in this attempt at an estimate of the work of Edward MacDowell, I have succeeded in steering a true course between the Scylla and Charybdis by which I have been menaced, I can scarcely bring myself to believe; but at least I may conscientiously say

that I have been sensible of the responsibilities of the adventure.

Mr. Arthur Symons has lately observed, with force and directness, that criticism is less "an examination with marks and prizes than a valuation of forces." It is as an attempt at such a valuation of my subject that I would have this essay regarded, rather than as an effort to anticipate a verdict which I, for one, am not unwilling to leave to a presumably competent if somewhat overburdened posterity.

LAWRENCE GILMAN.

NEW YORK,

July 14, 1905.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I. A ROMANTIC OF TO-DAY	1
II. THE MAN AND HIS CAREER	6
III. HIS ART AND ITS METHODS	18
IV. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A POET	33
V. A MATURED IMPRESSIONIST	47
VI. THE SONATAS	58
VII. THE SONGS	69
VIII. MACDOWELL TO-DAY—A SUMMARY	74

ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>To face page</i>
EDWARD MACDOWELL TO-DAY	<i>Frontispiece</i>
MACDOWELL AT FOURTEEN	8
<i>From a sketch by himself</i>	
A SKETCH OF LISZT	14
<i>Drawn by Macdowell</i>	
MACDOWELL IN 1896	20
<i>From a photograph by Cox, New York</i>	
THE LOG CABIN IN THE WOODS AT PETERBORO', WHERE MACDOWELL COMPOSES	24
A WINTER VIEW OF MACDOWELL'S COUNTRY HOME AT PETERBORO', NEW HAMPSHIRE	42
A VIEW OF THE GARDEN AT PETERBORO'	54
FACSIMILE OF A PORTION OF THE MANUSCRIPT OF THE "SONATA TRAGICA"	60
FACSIMILE OF A PASSAGE FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT OF THE "KELTIC" SONATA	66
MACDOWELL AT THE PIANO	72
<i>From a portrait painted by Ben Ali Haggin</i>	

CHAPTER I

A ROMANTIC OF TO-DAY

We who are but the far-away children of Manan cannot at will reach the Floating Pool, where the images of dreams acted and imagined are perhaps not less real than is our brief mortal underplay. But, at times, one here, another there, may pass over it, as the shadow of a flying sea-bird passes over a still inland water.—“The Magic Kingdoms.”

AMONG those music-makers of to-day who are both pre-eminent and representative the note of sincere and persuasive romance is infrequently sounded—or, if sounded at all, utters no contagious vitality of emotion, is without that vivid sentiment of enchantment which one recognises at once as of an impulse authentically and profoundly romantic. The fact must be obvious to the most casual observer of musical art in its contemporary unfoldings. The significant work of the most considerable musicians of our time—of Strauss, Debussy, Elgar, Loeffler—has few essentially romantic characteristics. Strauss—the later and representative Strauss—is exposing, one need scarcely note, quite other impulses and tendencies.

Debussy—the “très exceptionnel, très curieux, très solitaire M. Claude Debussy,” as Bruneau has called him : Debussy, the subtlest temperament in European music—is employing his exotic and luminous art in the weaving of a sensuous mysticism into designs of impalpable and iridescent beauty. Sir Edward Elgar is a musical pietist, a visionary of the austerer sort, who has found in Cardinal Newman’s ecstatic and elevated poem, “The Dream of Gerontius,” the motive for a work charged at many points with a lofty and poignant beauty; or who gives us sheer tonalised theology in his “Apostles”; or landscape and atmosphere in his orchestral rhapsody, “In the South”; or delicate meditation in his “Dream Children.” Charles Martin Loeffler, an Americanised Alsatian and a music-maker of the first order, is, like Debussy, an essential mystic, a tonal Maeterlinck, who finds in the tragic symbols of the Belgian poet and the wayward fantasies of Verlaine and Baudelaire and Kahn a congenial text for his dream-haunted and shadowy imaginings. The older men—Saint-Saëns and Massenet in France, Bruch and Goldmark in Germany, Grieg in Norway, Rimsky-Korsakoff in Russia, Parry, Stanford, and Mackenzie in England, Paine and Chadwick and Foote in America, are, so far as the content of their art is concerned, and apart from the extremely diverse character of its embodiment, survivals of a musical past; a recent past, to be sure, but still sufficiently removed from modernity to be

manifestly unrepresentative of to-day. Nor need one take account of the makers of operas, for this would involve an extraneous element : that of drama (Wagner's case was, of course, exceptional ; for one does not need to insist that Wagner was essentially a tone-poet, using the apparatus of the theatre merely as a vehicle for the production of works which are, virtually and fundamentally, tone-poems in a dramatic setting).

But if the romantic impulse has very nearly passed out of modern music, the noting of its disappearance must be qualified by a recognition of a body of contemporary tone-poetry in which the authentic spirit of romance has an exquisite life—which, indeed, owes its final and particular distinction to that impulse : I mean the work of the most eminent of American composers, Edward MacDowell.

I have elsewhere attempted to distinguish between that fatuous Romanticism of which Mr. Ernest Newman has observed the immitigable decay—the Romanticism which expended itself in the fabrication of a pasteboard world of "gloomy forests, enchanted castles, impossible maidens, and the obsolete profession of magic"—and that other and imperishable Spirit of Romance whose infrequent embodiment in modern music I have remarked. *That* is a romance in no wise divorced from reality—is, in fact, but reality imaginatively apprehended ; if it uses the old Romanticistic properties, it uses them not as substantives, but as symbols of intense emotional realities, dealing in a truth that is no less authentic

because it is reflected imaginatively, and through a beauty that may often be in the last degree incalculable and aerial.

It is in its persistent voicing of this valid spirit of romance that MacDowell's work is so noteworthy and so unparalleled—As I have said of him in another place, he has chosen more than occasionally to employ, in the realisation of his purposes, "what seems at first to be precisely the magical apparatus so necessary to the older Romanticism. He journeys, with a singular consistency, 'among the woods and wells of the world.' Dryads and elves invest his imagination, and he dwells at times under faery boughs and in enchanted woods; but for him, as for the poets of the Celtic tradition, these things are but the manifest images of an interior passion and delight. Seen in the transfiguring mirror of his music, the moods and events of the natural world and of the incessant drama of psychic life are vivified into shapes and designs of irresistible beauty and appeal."

Is not the essential Romantic he who, piercing the illusory veil of material fact, reveals to us, through symbol and imagery, that enduring soul of wonder and enchantment which inhabits the world? Is he not as that fabulous son of Lir who could see, in the depths of the Floating Pool of Manan, "the images of the dreams and thoughts of mortals?" It is the peculiar distinction of the musician whom I am to consider here that, in the most personal moments of his art, he has fulfilled the office of

the valid Romantics in their capacity as impassioned and articulate dreamers, who attest for us the immutable appeal of that changeless and timeless loveliness which the visible world of the senses and the invisible world of the imagination are ceaselessly revealing. ←

CHAPTER II

THE MAN AND HIS CAREER

THOSE who have discerned a persistent Celtic strain in MacDowell's artistic personality will not be surprised to know that there is substantial genealogical warrant for the truth of their observation. Both MacDowell's grandfather and grandmother on his father's side were born in Ireland, of Irish-Scotch parents. To his paternal great-grandfather, Alexander MacDowell, the composer traces the Scottish element in his blood; his paternal great-grandmother, whose maiden name was Ann McMurrin, was born near Belfast, Ireland. Their son, Alexander, who was born in Belfast, came to America early in the last century and settled in New York, where he married a countrywoman, Sarah Thompson, whom he met after his arrival in the New World. (Their son Thomas (Edward's father) was born in New York—where, until his retirement some time ago, he was engaged in business for many years. He married in 1856 Frances M. Knapp, a young American woman of English antecedents. Five years later, on December 18, 1861, their second son, Edward Alexander (he has not used the middle name of late

THE MAN AND HIS CAREER

7

years), was born at 220 Clinton Street—a neighbourhood which has since suffered the deterioration that has afflicted many of what were once the town's most irreproachable residential districts.

From his father, a man of keenly æsthetic instincts, Edward acquired his artistic tendencies and his Celtic sensitiveness of temperament, together with the pictorial instinct which was later to compete with his musical ability for decisive recognition. Thomas MacDowell displayed in his youth an uncommon facility as a painter and draughtsman—an accomplishment whose cultivation his parents, who were Quakers of a devout and sufficiently uncompromising order, discouraged in no uncertain terms. The exercise of his gift being thus restrained, Mr. MacDowell passed it on to his younger son—a somewhat superfluous endowment, in view of the fact that the latter was to demonstrate so singular an aptitude for an equally effective medium of expression.

Edward had his first piano lessons from a friend of the family, Mr. Juan Buitrago, when he was about eight years old. Mr. Buitrago was greatly interested in the boy, and had asked to be permitted to teach him his notes. His piano practice at this time was subject to frequent interruptions; for when strict supervision was not exercised over his work, he was prone to indulge at the keyboard his fondness for composition, which had developed concurrently and, one may infer, somewhat at the expense of, his proficiency in piano technique.

MacDowell continued his lessons with Mr. Buitrago for several years, when he was taken to Paul Desvernine, with whom he studied until he was fifteen, receiving occasional supplementary lessons from that brilliant mistress of the piano, Teresa Carreño. When he was in his fifteenth year it was determined that he should go abroad for a course in piano and theory at the Paris Conservatory, and in April, 1876, he left America for Paris, accompanied by his mother. He passed the competitive examination for admission to the Conservatory, and began the Fall term as a pupil of Marmontel in piano and of Savard in theory and composition—having for a fellow pupil, by the way, that most remarkable of contemporary music-makers, Claude Debussy, whom MacDowell describes as, even then, a youth of erratic tendencies.

MacDowell's experiences at the Conservatory were not unmingled with perplexities and embarrassment. His knowledge of French was no more comprehensive than that of the average American youth of his age, and he had considerable difficulty in following Savard's lectures, which, of course, presupposed for their comprehension a knowledge of the French equivalents of an elaborately specialised terminology. It was decided, therefore, that MacDowell should have the benefit of a course of tuition in French. A teacher was engaged, and Edward began a resolute attack upon the linguistic *chevaux de frise* which had proved so troublesome an impediment—a move which brought him, un-



MACDOWELL AT FOURTEEN

(From a set of seven by Horrida)

expectedly enough, to an important crisis in his affairs.

On one occasion it happened that he was varying the monotony of a study hour by drawing, under cover of his lesson-book, a portrait of his teacher, whose most striking physical characteristic was a nose of inordinate bulk. He was detected just as he was putting the finishing touches to the sketch, and was asked, greatly to his embarrassment, to exhibit the result. It appears to have been a remarkable piece of work as well as an excellent likeness, for the subject of it was eager to know whether or not MacDowell had studied drawing, and, if not, how he acquired his proficiency. Moreover, he insisted on keeping the sketch. Not long after, he called upon Mrs. MacDowell and informed her, to her astonishment, that he had shown the sketch to a certain very eminent French artist—an instructor at the École de Beaux Arts—and that the painter had been so profoundly impressed by the talent which it evidenced that he begged to propose to Mrs. MacDowell that she submit her son to him for a three-years' course of free instruction under his personal supervision, offering also to assume the responsibility of his maintenance during that time. The issue was a momentous one, and Mrs. MacDowell, in much perplexity of mind as to the wisest settlement of her son's future, laid the matter before Marmontel, who, fearful of losing one of his aptest pupils, urgently advised her against diverting her son from a musical career. The matter was finally left for

MacDowell himself to decide, and it was agreed that he should continue his studies at the Conservatory. Although it seems not unlikely that, with his natural facility as a painter and draughtsman and his uncommon faculties of vision and sympathetic observation, he would have achieved distinction as a painter, it may reasonably be doubted whether in that case music would not have lost appreciably more than art would have gained.

Conditions at the Conservatory were not to the taste of MacDowell, for he found his conceptions of right artistic procedure frequently opposed to those that prevailed among his teachers and fellow students. His growing disaffection was brought to a definite point of issue during the summer of 1878. It was the year of the Exposition, and MacDowell and his mother attended a festival concert at which Nicholas Rubinstein played one of the Tchaikovsky piano concertos. His performance was a revelation to the young American. "I never can learn to play like that if I stay here," he said resolutely to his mother, as they left the concert hall. Mrs. MacDowell, whose fixed principle it was to permit her son to decide his affairs according to his lights, considered with him the merits of various European Conservatories of reputation. They thought of Moscow, because of Nicholas Rubinstein's connection with the Conservatory there. Leipsic suggested itself; Frankfort was strongly recommended, and Stuttgart seemed to offer conspicuous advantages. The latter was finally deter-

mined upon, and Mrs. MacDowell and her son went there from Paris at Thanksgiving time, having agreed that the famous Stuttgart Conservatory would yield the desired sort of instruction.

The choice was anything but a happy one. It did not take MacDowell long to realise that, if he expected to conform to the Stuttgart requirements, he would be compelled to unlearn all that he had already acquired—would have virtually, so far as his technique was concerned, to begin *de novo*. Rubinstein himself, MacDowell was told by one of the students, would have had to reform his pianistic manners if he had placed himself under the guidance of the Stuttgart pedagogues. Nor does the system of instruction then in effect at the Conservatory appear to have been thorough, even within its own sphere. MacDowell tells of a student who could play an ascending scale superlatively well, but who was quite unable to execute the same scale in its descending form.

His mother, disheartened over the failure of Stuttgart to justify her expectations, was at a loss how best to solve the problem of her son's immediate future. Having heard much of the ability of Carl Heymann, the pianist, as an instructor, Mrs. MacDowell thought of the Frankfort Conservatory, where Heymann would be available as a teacher.

She heard from a friend of hers, to whom she had written for advice, that the pianist had promised soon to visit her at her home in Wiesbaden,

and it was suggested that the MacDowells pay her a visit at the same time, when they would have an excellent opportunity of becoming acquainted with Heymann. Mrs. MacDowell and her son were not slow to avail themselves of this proposal, and the end of the year found them in Wiesbaden. Here they met Heymann, who had just concluded a triumphantly successful *tournee* of the European capitals. They heard him play, and were impressed by his virtuosity, forcefulness, and poetic feeling. Heymann was not, however, to begin teaching at the Frankfort Conservatory until the following autumn, so MacDowell remained in Wiesbaden, studying composition and theory with the distinguished critic and teacher, Louis Ehlert, while his mother returned to America.

In the autumn of 1879 he entered the Conservatory at Frankfort as a pupil of Heymann in piano and Raff in composition. His two years' stay there was eminently satisfactory and profitable. He found both Raff and Heymann inspiring artistic mentors; in Raff, particularly, he encountered a most sympathetic and encouraging preceptor, and an influence at once potent and engrossing—a force which was to direct the currents of his own temperament into definite artistic channels.

(When Heymann resigned his position at the Conservatory in 1881 he recommended MacDowell as his successor—a proposal which was cordially seconded by Raff. But there were antagonistic influences at work within the Conservatory, and

MacDowell failed to get the appointment—on account, it was explained, of his youth. There came, opportunely, as it seemed, a chance to teach piano at the Darmstadt Conservatory, and he accepted the position. He found, however, that his duties were both arduous and unprofitable, and he was soon back in Frankfort, teaching privately and devoting an increasing portion of his time to composition. He had, meanwhile, made a number of successful public appearances as a pianist, playing at concerts in Wildbad, Wiesbaden, Darmstadt, Frankfort, Baden-Baden, and Hamburg. A visit which he paid to Liszt at Weimar resulted propitiously, and he received, through the cordial recommendation of that untiring foster-father of genius, an invitation to play his first piano suite before the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musik-Verein at its nineteenth annual convention, held at Zürich in July, 1882. Both the suite (composed in Frankfort early in the same year) and his performance of it were warmly praised. He played from the manuscript—for, until then, as he has confessed with engaging candour, he “had never waked up to the idea” that his compositions could be worth actual study or memorising. “I would not have changed a note in one of them for untold gold, and *inside* I had the greatest love for them; but the idea that any one else might take them seriously had never occurred to me.” The suite, numbered Opus 10 in the list of his published works, and issued in the following year by Breitkopf and Härtel, was the

first of his compositions which he has cared to preserve in print.*

The three years from 1882 to 1885, which were about evenly divided between concert giving and composition, were artistically productive and eventful. To this period belong the three songs of opus 11 ("Mein Liebchen," "Du liebst mich nicht," "Oben, wo die Sterne glühen"); the two songs of opus 12 ("Nachtlied" and "Das Rosenband"); the Prelude and Fugue (opus 13); the second piano suite (opus 14)—begun in the days of his Darmstadt professorship; the first piano concerto (opus 15); the "Serenade" (opus 16); the two "Fantasiestücke" of opus 17, "Erzählung" and the much-played "Hexentanz"; the "Barcarolle" and "Humoreske" of opus 18; the "Wald-Idyllen" (opus 19); the "Drei Poesien" (opus 20) and "Mondbilder" (opus 21)—both for four-hand performance; and the two tone poems for orchestra, "Hamlet" and "Ophelia" (opus 22), his first production of important content and significance.

Frankfort having ceased to hold much of interest for him after the death of Raff in the summer of 1882, MacDowell removed, in 1885, to Wiesbaden. He had married in the previous year Miss Marian Nevins of New York, and their life in Wiesbaden during the next few years was of an ideal serenity and detachment. MacDowell had determined to

* The "Two Old Songs," which bear an earlier opus number, were composed at a much later period—a fact which is betrayed by their patent difference in style.



*It looks like him though not much
of him*

Franz Liszt

A SKETCH OF LISZT BY M. D. WELLS

devote his entire energy to composition, and his enthusiastic activity was attested by productions of increasing interest and consequence. He wrote here all that is comprised between his Opus 23 and 35—the second piano concerto, the four pieces of Opus 24, the “Lancelot and Elaine” for orchestra, the charming songs “From an Old Garden,” three songs for male chorus, the “Idyls” and “Poems,” for piano, after Goethe and Heine, the two pieces for orchestra after the Song of Roland—“Die Sarazenen” and “Die Schöne Aldâ,” the four graphic little “Poems” for piano—“The Eagle,” “The Brook,” “Moonshine,” “Winter”; the five songs of opus 33 and 34, and the “Romanze” for ‘cello and orchestra. His reputation, meanwhile, had begun to spread both abroad and at home. Two movements from the first piano concerto were performed at one of Mr. Frank Van Der Stucken’s “Novelty Concerts” in Steinway Hall, New York, in March, 1885; and a few weeks earlier a movement from the first piano suite was played in London at the second of Mr. Louis Melbourne’s “American Concerts.” The “Hamlet” and “Ophelia” studies, of which the “Ophelia” section was performed for the first time at Sondershausen in August, 1886, was played, in whole or in part, in New York,* Baden-Baden, and Wiesbaden during the same year, and in Frankfort, and again in New York, in 1887. When he returned to America in the autumn of

* At the first of Mr. Van Der Stucken’s Chickering Hall Symphonic Concerts on November 6, 1886.

1888 he found himself already established in the minds of the musical public as a composer abundantly worthy of honour at the hands of his countrymen, although the works following his Opus 35, comprising his most important productions, were yet unwritten. He settled in Boston, where he found a considerable field for his activity as a pianist and teacher.

He made his first public appearance in America, in the double capacity of pianist and composer, at a Kneisel Quartet concert in Chickering Hall, Boston, in November, 1888, playing the Prelude, Intermezzo, and Presto from the first piano suite, and the piano part in Goldmark's B-flat Quintet. In March of the following year he played his second piano concerto at a Theodore Thomas orchestral concert at Chickering Hall, New York, and achieved an immediate and emphatic success—an instance of his early and ungrudging recognition by the responsible critics of his own country. Mr. H. E. Krehbiel, writing in the *Tribune*, took occasion to assert that the concerto "must be placed at the head of all works of its kind produced by either a native or adopted citizen of America;" and he confessed to having "derived keener pleasure from the work of the young American than from the experienced and famous Russian"—Tchaikovsky, whose Fifth Symphony was performed then for the first time in New York. A month later he played the same work at a Boston Symphony concert. Thenceforward his prestige grew steadily and securely. At

a concert given in New York in January, 1896, the Boston Symphony Orchestra paid him the noteworthy compliment of placing upon the programme two of his works, both of large dimensions—the first piano concerto and the “Indian” suite for orchestra.

(In the autumn of 1896 he accepted an offer to occupy the newly created Chair of Music at Columbia University, New York, and left Boston for his native town.) Subsequent dissatisfaction with conditions affecting his labours at the University fostered a growing desire to devote more of his time to composition, and in the spring of 1904, he resigned his professorship. He spends his winters in New York and his summers at his country home—his “farm,” as he calls it—in Peterboro, New Hampshire, where most of his writing is done in a log cabin in the woods, under the immediate and quickening influence of that natural world in whose atmosphere his music is so richly steeped. Both Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania, it may be added, have conferred upon him what Mr. Rupert Hughes has not inaptly termed “that unmusical degree, ‘Mus. Doc.’”

CHAPTER III

HIS ART AND ITS METHODS

MACDOWELL presents throughout the entire body of his work the noteworthy spectacle of a radical without extravagance, a musician at once in accord with, and detached from, the dominant artistic movement of his day. The observation is more a definition than an encomium. He is a radical in that, to his sense, music is nothing if not articulate: he will have none of a formal and merely decorative beauty—a beauty serving no expressional need of the heart or the imagination. In this ultimate sense he is a realist—a realist with the romantic's vision, the romantic's preoccupation; and yet he is as alien to the frequently unleavened and inordinate literalism of Richard Strauss as he is to the academic ideal. His art is directly and most intimately correlated with life, and inveterately he composes "with his eye on the object." But though he insists upon reality—though he conceives the prime mission of music to be exclusively and uncompromisingly interpretative, he insists no less emphatically that, in its function as an expressional instrument, it shall concern itself with essences and

impressions, and not at all with transcriptions. His standpoint is, in the last analysis, that of the poet rather than of the typical musician: the standpoint of the poet intent mainly upon a vivid embodiment of the quintessence of personal vision and emotion, who has elected to utter that truth and that emotion in terms of musical beauty. (He is, in fact, primarily and fundamentally a poet—one is, indeed, almost tempted to say that he is paramountly a poet, to whom the supplementary gift of musical speech has been extravagantly vouchsafed,

He is a realist, as I have said—applying the term in that larger signification which denotes the transmutation of life into visible or audible form, and which implicates Beethoven as well as Wagner, Schumann as well as Liszt and Raff, Tchaikovsky and Debussy as well as Strauss: all those in whom the desire for intelligible utterance co-exists with, or supersedes, the impulse toward perfected design. But if MacDowell's method of transmutation is not, as I have said, the method of Strauss, neither is it the method of Schumann, or of Raff, or of Debussy. He occupies a middle ground between the undaunted literalism of the Munich tone-poet and the sentimental posturings into which the romanticism of Schumann and Raff so frequently declined. It is impossible to conceive him attempting the musical exposition of such themes as kindled the imagination of Strauss when he wrought out his "*Heldenleben*," "*Zarathustra*," and "*Till Eulenspiegel*"; nor has he any appreciable affinity with the prismatic

subtleties of the younger French school: so that there is little in the accent of his musical speech to remind one of the representative voices of modernity.

Though he has avoided shackling his music to a detailed programme, he has never very seriously espoused the sophistical compromise, so ably combated by Mr. Ernest Newman, which concedes the legitimacy of programme music provided it speaks as potently to one who does not "know the story" as to one who does. The bulk of his music no more discloses its full measure of beauty and eloquence to one who is in ignorance of "the story" than does Wagner's "Faust" overture, Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet," or Goldmark's "Prometheus." Its appeal is conditioned upon an understanding of the basis of drama and emotional crisis upon which the musician has built; and in much of his music he has frankly recognised the fact, and has printed at the beginning of such works, as the "Idyls" and "Poems" after Goethe and Heine, the "Norse" and "Keltic" sonatas, the "Sea Pieces," and the "New England Idyls," the fragment of verse or legend or meditation which has served as the particular stimulus of his inspiration; while in other works he has contented himself with the suggestion of a mood or subject embodied in his title, as, for example, in his "Woodland Sketches,"—"To a Wild Rose," "Will o' the Wisp," "At an Old Trysting Place," "In Autumn," "From an Indian Lodge," "To a Water-lily," "A Deserted

Farm." That he has been tempted, however, in the direction of the compromise to which I have alluded is evident from the fact that although his symphonic poem "Lancelot and Elaine"—one of the earliest of his works—is built upon the frame of an extremely definite sequence of events,—such as Lancelot's downfall in the tournament, his return to the court, Guinevere's casting away of the trophies, the approach of the barge bearing Elaine's body, and Lancelot's reverie by the river bank,—he gives in the published score no hint whatever of the particular phases of that moving drama of passion and tragedy which he has so faithfully striven to represent. "I would never have insisted," he wrote in 1899, "that this symphonic poem need mean 'Lancelot and Elaine' to everyone. It did to me, however, and in the hope that my artistic enjoyment might be shared by others, I added the title to my music,"—which suggests the reflection that, if he intended his music to coincide with certain definite happenings in the story of Lancelot and the Maid of Astolat—the tournament, the passing of the funeral barge, and the rest—it could not, without a sacrifice of psychological and dramatic consistency, coincide with any other sequence of moods and happenings which the casual and uninstructed hearer might choose to substitute. "If the poem or the picture was necessary to the composer's imagination," observes Mr. Newman, "it is necessary to mine; if it is not necessary to either of us, he has no right to affix the title of it to his work. . . . If it is essential,

in the case of opera, that we should not be left in the slightest doubt as to who the protagonists are and what is the nature of their sentiments, it is equally essential, in the case of the symphonic poem, that we should not be left in ignorance of any of the points that have gone to make the structure of the music what it is. If melody, harmony and development are all shaped and directed by certain pictures in the musician's mind, we get no further than the mere outside of the music unless we are familiar with those pictures." One submits, of course, to the irrefutable and time-worn theory so sturdily maintained by the absolutists—that music is incapable of conveying particularised ideas: that it can communicate ecstasy and sorrow in the abstract, but not—unless the aid of words is invoked—the unique ecstasy or sorrow of a Juliet, or an Ophelia. The subject and the order of events once, however, deliberately implied in a piece of avowed delineative music, is it not, to say the least, somewhat treasonable to one's aspirations to tell the listener, in effect, that he may deduce from the music any programme that may happen to occur to him?

But if MacDowell has been inclined to err upon the side of a compromise with the absolutists, the tendency has been neither a persistent nor determined one; and he has been even less disposed toward the frankly literal methods of which Strauss and his followers are such invincible exponents. His nearest approach to such diverting expedients as the bleating sheep and the exhilarating wind-

machine of "Don Quixote" is in the denotement of the line,

"and like a thunderbolt he falls"

in his graphic paraphrase of Tennyson's poem, "The Eagle"—an indulgence which the most exigent champion of programmatic reserve would probably condone. In the main, MacDowell's predilection for what he chooses to call "suggestive music" finds expression in such continent and persuasive symbolism as he employs in those elastically-wrought tone poems, brief or vigorously sustained, in which he voices a mood or an experience with memorable beauty and vividness—in such things as his terse though astonishingly eloquent apostrophe "To a Wandering Iceberg," and his "In Mid-Ocean," from the "Sea Pieces"; in "To a Water-lily," from the "Woodland Sketches"; in the "Winter" and "In Deep Woods" from the "New England Idyls"; in the "Marionettes" ("Soubrette," "Lover," "Witch," "Clown," "Villain," "Sweetheart"); in the Raff-like orchestral suite, Op. 42 ("In a Haunted Forest," "Summer Idyl," "The Shepherdess' Song," "Forest Spirits"), and in the far more important and characteristic "Indian" suite for orchestra ("Legend," "Love Song," "In War-time," "Dirge," "Village Festival").

✓ Throughout his work it is evident that his chief concern has been to give noble and moving utterance to the elemental as he has found it in the natural world and in human life; and it is in this aspect of

his work that one must seek its final excellence : its range and eloquence as an expressional vehicle. If he is, in a singularly complete sense, the poet of the natural world, he is no less the instrument of purely human motion. He responds with a quick sensitiveness to the lure of those beautiful natural presences which the Celt in him finds unceasingly persuasive. His music is redolent of the breath and odour of woodland places, of lanes and moors and gardens ; or it is saturated with salt spray or it communicates the incommunicable in its voicing of that indefinable enchantment of association which clings about certain aspects, certain phases, of the visible world—that subtle emotion of things past and irrecoverable which may inhabit a field at night, or a quiet street at dusk, or a sudden intimation of spring in the scent of lilacs. But although such themes as he loves to dwell upon in his celebration of the magic of the natural world are very precious to his imagination, the human spectacle has held for him, from the first, an emotion scarcely less swift and abundant. His scope is comprehensive : he can voice the archest gaiety, a naïve and charming humour, in his “ Marionettes ” and in his songs, “ From an Old Garden ” ; there is tenderness and virile passion in the symphonic poems, an acute and spontaneous pathos in the early songs and in the piano paraphrases after Goethe and Heine ; while in the sonatas, in the “ Indian ” suite, and in many of the later songs, the tragic note is struck with impressive and indubitable authority.

Of the specifically musical traits through whose exercise MacDowell exhibits the tendencies and preferences which underlie his art, one must begin by saying that his (distinguishing quality—that which puts so unmistakable a stamp upon his work—eludes precise definition.) His tone is unmistakable. Its chief possession is a certain clarity and directness which is apparent no less in moments of great stress and complexity of emotion than in passages of simpler and slighter content. His style has little of the torrential rhetoric, the unbridled gusto and exuberance of Strauss, though it owns something of his forthright quality; nor has it anything of the shadows and hesitations of Debussy. One thinks, as a discerning commentator has observed, of the “broad Shakespearean daylight” of Fitzgerald’s fine phrase as being not inapplicable to the atmosphere of MacDowell’s writing. / He has little affinity for half-tones, for recondite effects of harmonic colour, for the wavering melodic line—which is as far as possible from implying that he is ever merely obvious or banal: that he never is. His clarity, his directness, find issue in an order of expression at once lucid and distinguished, at once spontaneous and expressive. It is difficult to recall, in any example of his maturer work, a single passage that is not touched with essential beauty and significance. He had, of course, his period of crude experimentation, his days of discipleship. In his earlier writing there is not a little that he would doubtless wish forgotten: much in which one seeks

vainly for that note of distinction and personality which sounds so constantly throughout the finer body of his work. But in that considerable portion of his output which is genuinely representative—say from his opus 45 onward—he sustains his art upon a noteworthy level of character and saliency.

The range of his expressional gamut is astonishing. One is at a loss to say whether he is happier in emotional moments of weighty significance,—as in many pages of the sonatas and some of the “Sea Pieces,”—or in such cameo-like achievements as the “Woodland Sketches,” certain of the *Marionettes*,* and the exquisite song group, “From an Old Garden,” in which he attains an order of delicate eloquence difficult to relate to the mind which shaped the heroic ardours of the two later sonatas into designs of majestic power and amplitude. His command of the accents of tragedy and dramatic crisis is sure and unfaltering—his power of forceful utterance is surpassed by no composer now living: not Richard Strauss, not D’Indy, not Elgar, has done anything which excels, in sheer virility, dynamic impulse, and sweep of line, the opening of the “Keltic” sonata. But his felicity in miniature is not less striking and admirable. He has, moreover, a remarkable gift for extremely compact expression. Time and again he amazes one by his ability to charge a composition

* The revised version, published in 1901, is referred to. The original edition, which appeared in 1888, is decidedly inferior.

of the briefest span with an emotional or dramatic content of large and far-reaching significance. His "To the Sea,"* for example, is but thirty-one bars long ; yet within this limited framework he has achieved a tone-picture which for breadth of conception and concentrated vividness of effect is not excelled in the contemporary literature of the piano.) Consider, also, the "Epilogue" in the revised version of the "Marionettes." The piece comprises only a score of measures ; yet within it the thought of the composer traverses a world of philosophical meditation : here is reflected the mood of one who looks with grave tenderness across the tragi-comedy of human life, in which, he would say to us, we are no less the playthings of a controlling destiny than are the figures of his puppet microcosm.

This variety and scope of expression are realised through a method at once plastic, homogeneous, and unlaboured ; his art has spontaneity—the deceptive spontaneity of the fastidious craftsman. It is not, in detail, a strikingly novel style : its character results from what a painter would call mass effects. His harmony, *per se*, is not unusual, if one sets it beside the surprising combinations evolved by such radicals as D'Indy, Debussy, and Strauss. MacDowell has shown no inclination to indulge in the intricate exfoliations which give so peculiar a flavour to the harmonic schemes of certain of his European contemporaries. It is in the novel

* From the "Sea Pieces" for piano, opus 55.

disposition of familiar material, rather than in the discovery and exposition of new elements, that MacDowell's emphatic individuality consists. Whether it is a more signal achievement to create a new speech through the imaginative readjustment of established locutions than to evolve it from fresh and unworked elements, is open to debate. Be that as it may, however, MacDowell's achievement is of the former order.

His method of harmonic manipulation is ingenious and pliable. An over-insistence upon certain formulas—eloquent and vital in themselves—has been charged against it, and the accusation is not entirely without foundation. MacDowell is exceedingly fond of seventh and ninth chords, and of suspensions of the chord of the diminished seventh. There is scarcely a page throughout his later work in which one does not encounter these effects in but slightly varied form. There is no doubt, however, that it is to his adroit and copious use of such combinations that one must ascribe the continual richness of his harmonic texture. I can think of no other composer, save Wagner, whose chord-progressions are so opulently coloured. His tonal web is always densely woven—he avoids “thinness” as he avoids the banal phrase and the futile decoration. In addition to the plangency of his chord combinations, as such, his evident polyphonic tendency is responsible for much of the solidity of his tonal fabric. His pages, particularly in the more recent works, are studded with

examples of felicitous and dexterous counterpoint—poetically significant, and of the most elastic and untrammelled contrivance. Even in passages of a merely episodic character, one is struck with the vitality and importance of his inner voices. Dissonance—in the sense in which we understand dissonance to-day—plays a comparatively unimportant part in his technical equipment. The climax of the second of the “Sea Pieces”—“From a Wandering Iceberg”—marks about as extreme a point of harmonic conflict as he ever touches. Nor has he been profoundly affected by the passion for unbridled chromaticism engendered in modern music by the procedures of Chopin and Wagner. Such a passage as that at the beginning of the two-four section of his “Nautilus” is far from native to his style. Even in the earlier of the orchestral works, “Hamlet and Ophelia” and “Lancelot and Elaine”—both written in Germany, and in the days when the genius of Wagner was an ambient and scorching flame—the writing is comparatively free from the more obvious chromatic contrivances. By no means so audaciously diatonic as Richard Strauss, he has made his style a subtle blend of opposing tendencies—whereby a marked gain accrues to his art : for where, as in the “working-out” section of the first movement of the “Norse” sonata, he makes extended use of a frankly chromatic idiom, the effect is of a curiously heightened significance.

‘ The fact that his songs constitute almost half the

entire bulk of MacDowell's work is not without significance ; for he has an authentic gift of melodic invention, which naturally finds its most untrammelled outlet in his purely lyrical writing. His insistence upon the value and importance of the *melos* is, indeed, one of his cardinal tenets ; and he is, in his practice,—whether writing for the voice, for piano or for orchestra,—inveterately and frankly melodic—melodic with a suppleness, a breadth, a freshness and spontaneity which are anything but common in the typical music of our day. / It is a curious experience to turn from the music of such typical moderns as Duparc, Fauré, Loeffler, and Debussy, with its hesitant melodic contours, its unceasing avoidance of definite patterns, its passion for the esoteric and its horror of direct communication, to the music of such a man as MacDowell. For he has accomplished the difficult and perilous feat of writing frankly without obviousness, apprehendably without triteness. His melodic outlines are firm, clean-cut, and fluent ; but they are seldom commonplace in design. His thematic substance at its best—in, say, the greater part of the sonatas, the "Sea Pieces," the "Four Songs," op. 56—has a superb distinction ; and even when it is not at its best—as in much of his writing up to his opus 45—it has a spirit and colour that lift it securely above mediocrity.

X It must have already become fairly obvious to any one who has followed this essay at an exposition of MacDowell's art that his view of the

traditional musical forms is a liberal one. Which is briefly to say that, although his application to his art of the fundamental principles of musical design is completely satisfying, he shares the typical modern distaste for the classic forms. His four sonatas, his two piano concertos, and his two "modern suites" for piano are his only adventures in the traditional instrumental moulds. The catalogue of his works is innocent of any symphony, overture, or string quartet. He has written no oratorio or cantata, and if he has dreamed of a possible music drama on an American or Celtic theme there are no records of the fact in any tangible form. The major portion of his work is as elastic and emancipated in form as it is unconfined in spirit. He has preferred always to shape his inspiration more or less faithfully upon the mould of a definite poetic concept, rather than upon a constructive formula necessarily, for him, eccentric and anomalous. Even in his sonatas the classic prescription is altered or abrogated at will in accordance with the requirements of the underlying poetic idea.

Always he is the essential poet, the clairvoyant impressionist, dealing with life in its large and profound as well as in its intimate aspects—limning tenderly, yet with a controlling and serene philosophy, such phases of the visible and human worlds as touch and quicken his imagination. At his best he has realised, with demonstrable completeness, that noble ideal of the artist's ultimate function

implied in the profound and subtle words of an authentic poet of to-day, Mr. Joseph Conrad :

“To snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life, is only the beginning of the task. The task, approached in tenderness and faith, is to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes and in the light of a sincere mood. It is to show its vibration, its color, its form, and, through its movement, its form, and its color, reveal the substance of its truth—disclose its inspiring secret : the stress and passion within the core of each convincing moment. In a single-minded attempt of that kind, if one be deserving and fortunate, one may perchance attain to such clearness of sincerity that at last the presented vision of regret, of pity, of terror, of mirth, shall awaken in the hearts of the beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity—of the solidarity in mysterious origin, in toil, in joy, in hope, in uncertain fate, which binds men to each other.”

CHAPTER IV

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A POET

MACDOWELL'S impulse toward significant expression was not slow in declaring itself. The first "modern suite" (opus 10), the earliest of his listed works, which at first glance seems to be merely a group of contrasted movements of innocently traditional aspect, with the expected *Præludium*, *Presto*, *Intermezzo*, *Fugue*, etc., contains, nevertheless, the germ of the programmatic principle; for at the head of the third movement (*Andantino* and *Allegretto*) one comes upon a motto from Virgil—"Per amica silentia lunæ," and the *Rhapsodic* is introduced with the sufficiently portentous

"Lasciate ogni speranza
Voi ch' entrate"

of Dante. The *Præludium* of the second piano suite, opus 14 (written when he was twenty-one) is similarly annotated, having been suggested by lines from Byron's "Manfred." In the "Zwei Fantasiestücke," opus 17—"Erzählung" and "Hexentanz"—but more particularly in the "Wald-Idyllen" of opus 19—"Waldesstille," "Spiel der Nymphen,"

"Träumerei," and "Driadentanz,"—a definite poetic concept is implied. Here the formative influence of Raff is evident. The works which follow—"Drei Poesien,"—"Nachts am Meere,"—"Erzählung aus der Ritterzeit,"—"Ballade,"—and the "Mondbilder," after Hans Christian Andersen—are of a similar mould. The romanticism which pervades them is not of a very finely distilled quality : they are not, that is to say, the product of a vision clarified, direct, and self-sprung—of the vision which prompted the issue of such things as the "Woodland Sketches," the "Sea Pieces," and the "New England Idyls." In these earlier works one feels that the romantic view has been assumed somewhat vicariously—one can imagine the favourite pupil of Raff producing a group of "Wald-Idyllen" quite as a matter of course, and without any interior and personal realisation of the impulse which should underlie their conception. Nor is the style marked by individuality, except in occasional passages. There are traces of his peculiar quality in the first suite—in the 6/8 passage of the *Rhapsodic*, for example ; in portions of the first piano concerto (the ample and flowing lines of the second theme of the first movement are particularly characteristic), in the "Erzählung," and in No. 3 ("Traumerei") of the "Wald-Idyllen" ; but the prevailing tone of his style at this time was, quite naturally, strongly Teutonic : one encounters in it intimations of Liszt, of Rubinstein, of Schumann, of Raff, of Wagner.

Not until one reaches the "Hamlet" and

"Ophelia" poems for orchestra (opus 22) does one perceive that he is beginning to find himself. These "poems," dedicated to Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, were composed at Frankfort in 1884, when he had not yet turned twenty-three; yet the music is curiously ripe in feeling and accomplishment. There is breadth and steadiness of view in the conception, passion and sensitiveness in its embodiment. In form it is more elastic than it would have been in Liszt's hands—more elastic and more subtly articulated. It is mellower, of a deeper and finer beauty, than anything he had previously done, though nowhere has it the saliency and vividness of his later works. In each of the poems one is baffled, however, by the inconsistency of procedure that I noted in a previous chapter, in connection with the "Lancelot and Elaine": the failure to acquaint the listener with the sequence of moods and events upon which the music is organically dependent—as if, to revert to a thrice-used illustration, the composer of a song should, before making it public, discard all but the title of the poem to which it owes its inspiration—or as if one were required to hear it sung in an unknown tongue. It is not necessary to lay undue stress on the point in MacDowell's case, however, for in his maturer works he has amply atoned for the seeming compromises of his earlier days, and has, in his "New England Idyls," for example, unreservedly "played fair" with his auditor in the matter of a scrupulous recognition of the rules of the game.

The second piano concerto (opus 23), written at Wiesbaden in the summer of 1885, is out of the direct line of MacDowell's development as an exponent of delineative tone painting. It is fairly within the class of that order of music which it has been generally agreed to describe as "absolute." It is innocent of any programme, declared or implied. Together with its companion work, the first piano concerto, the "Romanza" for 'cello and orchestra, the concert study, opus 36, and such conventional *morceaux* as the early "Serenata" and "Bacarrolle" (of which, it should be noted, there are extremely few among his productions), it represents the very limited body of his writing which does not, in some degree, propose and enforce a definite poetic concept. Not elsewhere in his earlier work has MacDowell marshalled the elemental material of his art with so confident an artistry. In essential substance the work is not extraordinary. In distinction and beauty of thought it marks, indeed, a certain decline from the plane of the "Hamlet" and "Ophelia" music. The manner derives something from Grieg, more from Liszt, and there is comparatively little disclosure of personality. But the manipulation is, throughout, the work of a music-wright of brilliant executive capacity. In fundamental logic, in cohesion, flexibility, and symmetry of organism, it is a brilliantly successful accomplishment. As in all of MacDowell's writing, its allegiance is to the basic and unalterable principles of structure and

design, rather than to a traditional and arbitrary formula.

The succeeding opus (24), comprising the "Humoreske," "March," "Cradle Song," and "Czardas," is unimportant. Of the four pieces the gracious "Cradle Song" is the most distinguished, though the group as a whole belongs to that extremely small portion of his output which one does not accept at once as of serious artistic consequence. With the "Lancelot and Elaine" (opus 25), however, one comes upon a work of the grade of the "Hamlet" and "Ophelia" music. In a foregoing chapter I have recorded my convictions touching the procedure which resulted in the offering of so unequivocal a piece of delineative music without an adequate clue to its purposes; so that I need not further emphasise what I cannot help regarding as a palpable inconsistency. Of the obvious persuasiveness and beauty of the music I make no doubt. MacDowell has a peculiar affinity for the spirit of the Arthurian tales and an almost unfailing facility in whatever musical transmutation of them he attempts. His tone poem (written at Wiesbaden in 1886 and dedicated to Templeton Strong) is avowedly "nach Tennyson," and the scheme of the music is a graphic attestation of the announcement on the title page. The work follows consistently the larger curves of the poem, and musical equivalents are sought and found for such crucial incidents as the meeting with Elaine, the tournament, Lancelot's downfall, his return to the court and the

interview with Guinevere, the apparition of the funeral barge, and the grave soliloquy of Lancelot by the river bank. The work is dramatically conceived, richly and variously wrought. There are passages of impressive tenderness,—as in the incident of the approaching barge; of arresting climactic force,—as in the description of the incident of the casting away of the trophies; and there are admirable details of imagination and workmanship. The scoring, for full orchestra, is rich and adroit, though not very elaborate. As always with him, the instrumental texture is closely woven, although his utilisation of its possibilities is very far from exhaustive. One misses, for example, the colouring of available harp effects, for which he appears to have a distaste, since the instrument is not required in any of his orchestral works. On the whole, the “Lancelot and Elaine” is less interesting an achievement than the earlier Shakesperean studies; for though in neither the “Hamlet” nor the “Ophelia” is the tonal web so dense and various, the more recent work is less intensely imagined and less movingly realised.

The “Six Idyls after Goethe,” for piano (opus 28), are noteworthy as foreshadowing the unequivocal impressionism which was to find issue in the maturer “Woodland Sketches,” “Sea Pieces,” and “New England Idyls.” The Goethe paraphrases, although they have only a tithe of the graphic nearness and felicity of the later pieces, are yet fairly successful in their attempt to set forth a musical corre-

spondence for certain definitely stated concepts and ideas—a partial fulfilment of the method implied in the earlier “Wald-Idyllen.” He presents himself here as one who has yielded his imagination to an intimate contemplation of the natural world, and who has the faculty of uttering whatever sudden or gradual revelation of loveliness or majesty has been vouchsafed. At once, in studying these pieces, one observes a wide departure in method and accomplishment from the style of the “Wald-Idyllen.” In them, it seemed, the poet had somehow failed to compose “with his eye on the object”: the vision lacked steadiness, lacked penetration—or it may be that the vision was present, but not the power of precipitation. In the Goethe paraphrases, on the other hand, we are given, in a measure, the sense of the thing perceived; I say “in a measure,” for his power of acute and sympathetic observation and of eloquent transmutation had not yet come to its highest pitch. Of the six “Idyls,” three—“In the Woods,” “Siesta,” and “To the Moonlight”—are memorable, though uneven; and of these the third, after Goethe’s “An den Mond,” adumbrates faintly MacDowell’s riper manner. “The Silver Clouds,” “Flute Idyl,” * and “Blue Bell” are decidedly less characteristic.

In “Die Sarazenen” and “Die Schöne Aldâ,” two fragments for orchestra after the “Song of Roland,”

* The poems which suggested this and the preceding piece were used again by MacDowell in two of the most admirable of the “Eight Songs,” opus 47.

numbered opus 30, a graver and more human note is sounded. The "fragments," which were originally intended to form part of a "Roland" symphony, were published in 1891 in their present form, the plan for a symphony, conceived some years earlier in Wiesbaden, having been definitely abandoned. "Die Sarazenen" is a sombre picturing of the scene in which Ganellone swears to commit treason against Roland, whilst the Saracens feast amid the flaring of pagan fires and the wailing of sinister music. It is a forceful conception, barbaric in colour and rhythm, and most picturesquely scored. The second fragment, "Die Schöne Aldâ," is, however, a more memorable work, depicting the loveliness and the grieving of Aldâ, Roland's betrothed. In spite of its "Tristan"-like connotations—it is the frankest tribute MacDowell has paid to the most imperious of modern geniuses—the work bears the mark of his own stencil. It is richly fibred, and it has moments of compelling beauty. Both pieces are unconditionally programmatic in bent, and, with excellent wisdom, MacDowell has quoted upon the fly-leaf of the score those portions of the "Song of Roland" from which the conception of the music sprang.

Like the "Idyls" after Goethe, the "Six Poems" after Heine (opus 31), for piano, are unconditionally devoted to the embodiment of a definite poetic subject,—with the difference that instead of the landscape impressionism of the Goethe studies we have a persistent impulse toward psychological

signification. Each of the poems which he has selected for illustration has a human content of appreciable poignancy, which the music reflects with varying success. The style is more individualised than in the Goethe pieces, and the invention is, on the whole, of a superior order. The "Scotch Poem" (No. 2) is dramatic, and the emotion of the music exerts an irresistible spell—the

". schöne, kranke Frau,
Zartdurchsichtig und marmorblass,"

and her desolate lamenting, are sharply projected, though scarcely with the power and vividness that he would bring to bear upon the endeavour to-day. Less effective, but decidedly more characteristic, is the "Shepherd Boy" (No. 5). This is almost, at moments, MacDowell in the happiest phase of his lighter vein. The transition from F minor to major, after the *fermata* on the second page, is as typical as it is delectable; and the fifteen bars that follow are of a recognisably MacDowellish tinge. "From Long Ago" and "From a Fisherman's Hut" are less good, and "The Post Waggon" and "Monologue" are disappointing—the latter especially so, because the exquisite poem which he has chosen to enforce, that matchless lyric beginning "Der Tod, das ist die kühle Nacht," would seem to offer an insurpassable incentive to eloquent expression.

In the "Four Little Poems" of opus 32 one encounters a work which it is possible to admire

without reservation or qualification : I mean the music conceived as an illustration to Tennyson's poem, "The Eagle." The three other numbers of this opus, "The Brook," "Moonshine," and "Winter," one can praise only in measured terms—although "Winter," which attempts a representation of the "widow bird" and frozen landscape of Shelley's lyric, has some measures that dwell persistently in the memory : but "The Eagle" is a superb achievement. Its deliberate purpose is to realise in tone the imagery and atmosphere of Tennyson's lines—an object which it accomplishes with astonishing completeness. As a feat of sheer tone-painting I know of few things similar in scope and purpose that surpass it in fitness, concision, and felicity. It displays a power of imaginative reconstruction hitherto undisclosed in MacDowell's writing. Here are the severe and exalted mood of the opening lines of the poem, the sense of lonely and wind-swept spaces, which Tennyson has so magnificently and so succinctly conveyed. Here, too, are the far-off, "wrinkled sea," and the final cataclysmic and sudden descent : yet, despite the literalism of the close, there is no yielding of artistic sobriety in the result, for the music has an unassailable dignity. It remains, even to-day, one of MacDowell's most characteristic and admirable performances. —

Of the "Romanza" for 'cello and orchestra (opus 35), the Concert Study (opus 36), and "Les Orientales" (opus 37),—three *morceaux* for piano, after Victor Hugo,—I need not speak in detail. "Perfunc-

tory" is the word which one must use to describe the creative impulse of which they are the ungrateful legacy — an impulse less spontaneous, there is reason to believe, than utilitarian. Perhaps they may most justly be denoted as almost the only instances in which MacDowell has given heed to the possibility of a reward not primarily and exclusively artistic.

The "Marionettes" of opus 38 are in a wholly different case. Published first in 1888, the year which saw MacDowell's return to America after his twelve studious and fruitful years abroad, they have been extensively revised and amplified, and now appear under a radically different guise. In its present form, the group comprises six *genre* studies — "Soubrette," "Lover," "Witch," "Clown," "Villain," "Sweetheart" — besides the recently added "Prologue" and "Epilogue." Here MacDowell is in one of his happiest moods. It was a fortunate and charming conceit which prompted the plan of the series, with its half-playful, half-ironic, yet lurkingly poetic suggestions; for in spite of the mood of bantering gaiety which placed the pieces in such mocking juxtaposition, there is, throughout, an undertone of grave and meditative tenderness which it is one of the peculiar properties of MacDowell's art to communicate and enforce. It is continually apparent in "The Lover" and "Sweetheart," fugitively so in the "Prologue," and, in an irresistible degree, in the exceedingly poetic and deeply felt "Epilogue" — one of the most beautiful of

MacDowell's smaller works, in which the more intimate aspect of his genius is engagingly displayed. The music of these pieces is, as with other of his earlier work that he has since revised, confusing to the observer who attempts to place it among his productions in the order suggested by its opus number. For although in the list of his published works the "Marionettes" follow immediately on the heels of the Concert Study and "Les Orientales," the form in which they are now most generally known represents the much later period of the "Keltic" sonata—a fact which will, however, be sufficiently evident to any one who studies the two versions considerably enough to realise the difference between more or less experimental craftsmanship and dexterously heedful artistry. The observer will notice, incidentally, the abandonment of the traditional Italian terms of expression and the substitution of English words and phrases, which are used freely and with adroitness to indicate every shade of the composer's meaning. In place of the stereotyped terms of the music-maker's familiarly limited vocabulary, we have such a system of direct and elastic expression as Schumann adopted. Thus one finds, in the "Prologue," such unmistakable and suggestive directions as "with sturdy good humour," "pleadingly," "mockingly"; in the "Soubrette"—"coquettishly," "poutingly"; in the "Lover"—"questioningly"; in the "Villain"—"with sinister emphasis," "sardonically." This method, which MacDowell has followed consistently in all his later

works, has obvious advantages; and it becomes in his hands a picturesque and eloquent contrivance for the conveyance of a musical idea. Its defect, equally obvious, is that it is not, like the conventional Italian terminology, universally intelligible.

The "Twelve Studies" of opus 39 are less original in conception and of less artistic moment than the "Marionettes." Their titles—among which are a "Hunting Song," a "Romance," a "Dance of the Gnomes," and others of like connotation—suggest, in a measure, that imperfectly realised romanticism which I have before endeavoured to separate from the intimate spirit of sincere romance which MacDowell has so often succeeded in embodying. The same thing is true, too, though in lesser degree, of the Suite for orchestra (opus 42). It is more Raff-like—not in effect but in conception—than anything he has done. There are four movements: "In a Haunted Forest," "Summer Idyl," "The Shepherdess' Song," and "Forest Spirits," together with a supplement, "In October," forming part of the original suite, but not published until several years later. The work, as a whole, has atmosphere, spirit, vitality, but somehow it does not seem either as poetic or as distinguished as one imagines it might have been made. It is freshly and vigorously sustained, it is expertly scored; but it lacks persuasion—lacks, to put it baldly, direct inspiration. Passing over a sheaf of piano pieces, the "Twelve Virtuoso Studies" of opus 46 (of which the

"Novelette and "Improvisation" are most noteworthy), we come to a stage of MacDowell's development in which, for the first time, he presents himself as an assured and confident master of musical impressionism upon a scale of indubitable consequence.

CHAPTER V

X A MATURED IMPRESSIONIST

WITH the completion and production of his "Indian" suite for orchestra (opus 48) MacDowell came, in a measure, into his own. Mr. Philip Hale, writing apropos of a performance of the suite at a concert of the Boston Symphony Orchestra* in December, 1897, did not hesitate to describe the work as "one of the noblest compositions of modern times." Elsewhere he wrote concerning it: "The thoughts are the musical thoughts of high imagination; the expression is that of the sure and serene master. There are here no echoes of Raff, or Wagner, or Brahms, men that have each influenced mightily the musical thought of to-day. There is the voice of one composer: a virile, tender voice that does not stammer, does not break, does not wax hysterical: the voice of a composer that not only must pour out that which has accumulated within him, but knows all the resources of musical oratory—in a word, the voice of MacDowell." X Mr. James Huneker asserted that the suite held its own

* The suite is dedicated to the Orchestra and its former conductor, Mr. Emil Paur.

on a programme bearing the name of Tchaikovsky and his sixth symphony; and Mr. H. E. Krehbiel and others wrote in a similar vein.

It is well that such comments should be recorded, for they testify to the singularly ungrudging recognition which was accorded to the first of MacDowell's entirely successful achievements in an order of tone poetry that makes no concealment of its frankly impressionistic intent. The event obtains, moreover, an additional significance for the reason that the suite was scarcely calculated to make an immediate appeal; for there is in it much that, one can easily imagine, must have seemed to many either perplexing or consciously bizarre; although, as Mr. Hale has quite justly observed, few modern compositions are, in reality, "so utterly free from the taint of insincerity, from the grievous flaw of affectation, as this suite"—a judgment which, to-day, seems as sound as it is incontestable.

MacDowell has derived the greater part of the thematic substance of the suite, as he acknowledges in a prefatory note, from the melodies of the North American Indians, with the exception of a few subsidiary themes of his own invention. "If separate titles for the different movements are desired," he says in his note, "they should be arranged as follows: I. 'Legend'; II. 'Love Song'; III. 'In War-time'; IV. 'Dirge'; V. 'Village Festival'"—a concession in which one traces a hint of the inexplicable and amusing reluctance of the musical impressionist to acknowledge

the existence of a programmatic intention in his work. In the case of the "Indian" suite, however, the intention is clear enough, even without the proffered titles; for the several movements are unmistakably based upon firmly held concepts of a definite dramatic and emotional significance. As supplemental aids to the discovery of his poetic purposes, the phrases of direction which he has placed at the beginning of each movement are indicative, taken in connection with the titles which he sanctions. The first movement, "Legend," is headed: *Not fast. With much dignity and character*; the second movement, "Love Song," is to be played *Not fast. Tenderly*; the third movement, "In War-time," is marked: *With rough vigor, almost savagely*; the fourth: *Dirge-like, mournfully*; the fifth, "Village Festival": *Swift and light*. Here, certainly, is food for the imagination, the frankest of invitations to the impressionable listener. There is no reason to believe that the music is built upon such a detailed and specific plan as underlies, for example, the "Lancelot and Elaine"; the notable fact is that MacDowell has attained in this work to a vividness and force of utterance, an eloquence of denotement, a distinction of style, and a security and strength of workmanship, which he had not hitherto brought to the fulfilment of an avowedly impressionistic scheme.* He has articulated the

* The "Tragica" sonata, opus 45, which antedates the suite by several years, and of which I shall write in another chapter, has a considerably less definite content.

emotion and the character of his subject, both in its interior significance and in its outward meaning, with superlative power and felicity—at times with profoundly impressive effect, again with a brooding and poignant tenderness. Above all, he has caught and embodied the essential spirit of his theme: these are the sorrows and laments and rejoicings, not of our own day and people, but of the vanished life of an elemental and dying race; here is the solitude of dark forests, of illimitable and wind-swept prairies, and the sombreness and wildness of one knows not what grim tragedies and romances and festivities enacted in the shadow of a fading past.

Into the discussion of the relation between such works as the "Indian" suite and the establishment of a possible "American" school of music I shall not intrude. To those of us who believe that such a "school," whether desirable or not, can never be created through conscious effort, and who are entirely willing to permit time and circumstance to bring about its establishment, the subject is as wearisome as it is unprofitable. The logic of the belief that it is possible to achieve a representative rationalism in music by the ingenuous process of adopting the idiom of an alien race is not immediately apparent; and although MacDowell in this suite has admittedly derived his basic material from the North American aborigines, he has never, so far as I am aware, claimed that his impressive and noble score constitutes, for that reason, a representatively

national utterance. He realises, doubtless, that territorial propinquity is quite a different thing from racial affinity; and that a musical art derived from either Indian or Ethiopian sources can be "American" only in a partial and quite unimportant sense. He has recognised that racial elements are transitory and mutable, and that provinciality in art, even when it is called patriotism, makes for a probable oblivion.

I have elsewhere dwelt upon MacDowell's pre-occupation with the sound and colour of the natural world. If one is tempted, at times, to praise in him the celebrant of the "mystery and the majesty of earth" somewhat at the expense of the musical humanist, it is because he has in an uncommon degree the intimate visualising faculty of the essential Celt: again and again one is aware that that "sheer, inimitable Celtic note" which we have long known how to recognise in another art, is being sounded in the music of this composer who has in his heart and brain something of "the wisdom of old romance." With him one realises that "natural magic" is, as Mr. Yeats has somewhere said, "but the ancient worship of Nature and that troubled ecstasy before her, that certainty of all beautiful places being haunted, which is brought into men's minds." We have observed the operation of this impulse in such comparatively immature productions as the "Wald-Idyllen" and the "Idyls" after Goethe, and in the "Four Little Poems" of opus 32 and the first orchestral suite; but it is in the

comparatively recent "Woodland Sketches" and "Sea Pieces," for piano, that the tendency comes to its finest issue.

Music, of course—from Frohberger and Haydn to Wagner, Raff, and Debussy—abounds in examples of natural imagery. In claiming a certain excellence for his method one need scarcely imply that MacDowell has ever threatened the supremacy of such things as the "Rheingold" prelude or the "Walküre" fire music. It is as much by his choice of subjects as by the peculiar vividness and felicity of his expression, that he persuades one of the singularity of his place among tone-poets of the external world. He has never attempted such sweeping frescoes as Wagner delighted to paint. Of his descriptive music by far the greater part is written for the piano ; so that, at the start, a very definite limitation is imposed upon magnitude of plan. You cannot achieve on the piano, with any adequacy of effect, a mountain-side in flames, or the prismatic arch of a rainbow, or the wavering architecture of cloud forms ; so MacDowell has confined himself within the bounds of such canvases as he paints upon in his "Four Little Poems" ("The Eagle," "The Brook," "Moonshine," "Winter,") in his first orchestral suite, and in the inimitable "Woodland Sketches" and "Sea Pieces." Thus his themes are starlight, a water-lily, will o' the wisps, a deserted farm, a wild rose, the sea-spell, deep woods, an old garden. As a just exemplification of his practice, consider, let me say, his "To a Water-lily," from the

"Woodland Sketches," than which I know of nothing in objective tone-painting, for the piano or for the orchestra, more sensitively felt, more exquisitely accomplished. So far as I am aware, MacDowell is the first musician to attempt precisely this sort of thing. Of all the composers who have seriously essayed a tonal impressionism inspired by the moods of the natural world, I know of none who has accomplished such vivid and indelible effects with a similar condensation and completeness. Often, in studying his work in this sort, one is aware of an order of poetry that seems essentially "a touch from behind a curtain." It is the natural speech of one who, having fallen, through the ignominies of daily life, among the barren makeshifts of reality, "remembers the enchanted valleys." It is touched with the deep and wistful tenderness, the primæval nostalgia, which is never very distant from the mood of MacDowell's writing, and in which, again, one is tempted to trace the essential Celt. It is this close kinship with the secret presences of the natural world, this intimate responsiveness to elemental moods, this quick sensitiveness to the aroma and the magic of places, that sets him recognisably apart. /

If in the "Indian" suite MacDowell disclosed the full maturity of his powers of imaginative and structural design, it is in the "Woodland Sketches" (opus 51) that his speech, freed from such incumbrances as were imposed upon it by his deliberate adoption of an exotic idiom, assumes for the first

time some of its most engaging and distinctive characteristics. Consider, for example, number ten of the group, "Told at Sunset." Here is the quintessence of his style in one of its most frequent aspects. The manner has a singular simplicity, yet it would be difficult to say in what, precisely, the simplicity consists; it has an even more singular individuality,—yet the particular trait in which it resides is not easily determined: for the simplicity is certainly not of the harmonic plan,—which is at several points most carefully calculated; nor of the melodic outline, which is subtly yet frankly modelled; and the individuality does not lie in any eccentricity or determined novelty of effect. Both the flavour of simplicity and of personality are, one concludes, more a spiritual than an anatomical possession of the music. Its quality is as intangible and pervasive as that dim magic of "unremembering remembrance" that is awakened in some by the troubling tides of spring; it is apparently as unsought for as are the naïve utterances of folk-song. It is his unfailing charm, and it is everywhere manifest in his later work: that spontaneity and *insouciance*, that utter absence of self-consciousness, which is in nothing so surprising as in its serene antithesis to what one has come to accept—too incuriously, it may be—as the dominant accent of musical modernity.

△ These pieces have an inescapable fragrance, tenderness, and zest. "To a Wild Rose," "Will o' the Wisp," "In Autumn," "From Uncle Remus," and "By a Meadow Brook" are slight in poetic sub-



A VIEW OF THE GARDEN AT PETERBORO

stance, though executed with charm and humour ; but the five other pieces — "At an Old Trysting Place," "From an Indian Lodge," "To a Water-lily," "A Deserted Farm," and "Told at Sunset"—are of a different calibre. With the exception of "To a Water-lily," whose loveliness is apparent and unconcealed, these tone poems in little are a curious blend of what, for an apter name, one must call nature-poetry, and psychological suggestion. "At an Old Trysting Place," "From an Indian Lodge," "A Deserted Farm," and "Told at Sunset" imply a consecutive dramatic purpose which is emphasised by their connection through a hint of thematic community. The element of drama, though, is not insisted upon — indeed, a large portion of the searching charm of these studies lies in their tactful reticence : MacDowell here makes no attempt to crowd upon a canvas designedly restricted the fulness of detail and colour which he can, upon occasion, present.

In the "Sea Pieces" of opus 55 a larger endeavour is consummated. The set comprises eight short pieces, few of them over two pages in length ; yet they are modelled upon ample lines, and they have, in a conspicuous degree, that property to which I have elsewhere alluded—the property of suggesting within a limited framework an emotional or dramatic content of large and far-reaching significance. I spoke in an earlier chapter, in this connection, of the first of these pieces, "To the Sea." I must reiterate that this tone poem seems to me

one of the most entirely admirable things in the literature of the piano ; and it is typical, in the main, of the volume. MacDowell is one of the very few composers who have been thrall to the spell of the sea ; none, I think, has felt that spell so irresistibly or has communicated it so justly or with so conquering an eloquence. / This music is full of the glamour, the awe, the mystery, of the sea ; of its sinister and terrible beauty, but also of its tonic charm, its secret allurements. There is an exhilaration even in his titles (which he has supplemented with mottos) : "To the Sea," "From a Wandering Iceberg," "Starlight," "From the Depths," "In Mid-Ocean." He reminds one of both Whitman and Swinburne in his temperamental oneness with the sea-mood and the inspired manner in which he bears witness thereto. I make no concealment of my admiration for these pieces : with the sonatas, certain of the "New England Idyls," and a few of the songs, they record, I think, his high-water mark. He has carried them through with superb gusto, with unflagging vividness and intensity. In "To the Sea," "From the Depths," and "In Mid-Ocean," it is the sea of Whitman's magnificent apostrophe that he celebrates—the sea of

" brooding scowl and murk,"

of

" unloosed hurricanes,"

speaking, imperiously,

" with husky-haughty lips,"

while elsewhere, as in the "Wandering Iceberg" and "Nautilus" studies, the pervading tone is of Swinburne's

" deep divine dark dayshine of the sea."

" Starlight " is of a brooding and solemn tenderness. The " Song " and " A.D. MDCXX." (a memoir of the notorious galleon of the Pilgrims) are in a lighter vein. The tonal plangency, the sheer epic quality, of these studies is extraordinary,—exposing a tendency toward an orchestral fulness and breadth of style that will offer a more pertinent theme for comment in a consideration of the sonatas. But one reverts to them oftenest for their vivid poetry, their evocation of the mood and colour of unfathomable mysteries.

CHAPTER VI

THE SONATAS

MACDOWELL has never hesitated, as I have elsewhere said, to adapt the sonata form to the needs of his poetic purposes. Moreover, he has expressed definite convictions as to the considerations which should govern its employment. "If the composer's ideas do not imperatively demand treatment in that (the sonata) form," he has observed—"that is, if his first theme is not actually dependent upon his second and side themes for its poetic fulfilment—he has not composed a sonata movement, but a pot-pourri, which the form only aggravates." There can be little question of the success which has attended his application of this principle to his own performances in this most formidable of expressional mediums, nor of the extraordinary skill and tact with which he has reshaped the form in accordance with the plan of the conception which he has chosen to embody.

His four sonatas belong, undeniably, though with a variously strict allegiance, to the domain of programme-music—to decline again upon a term of exasperating looseness. Neither the "Tragica," the

"Eroica," the "Norse," nor the "Keltic," makes its appeal exclusively to the tonal sense. If one looks to these works for the particular kind of gratification which he is accustomed to derive, for example, from a symphony of Brahms (to allege the most extreme of contrasts), he will not find it. It is impossible fully to appreciate and enjoy the last page of the "Keltic," for instance, without some comprehension of the dramatic crisis upon which the musician has built—although its beauty and power, as sheer music, are immediately perceptible.

With the exception of the "Tragica," the poetic substratum of the sonatas has been avowed with more or less particularity. In the "Tragica"—his first essay in the form *—he has vouchsafed only a general indication of his purpose, which he has assumed to be declared with sufficient explicitness in the title which he has given the work. The tragic note is sounded, with impressive authority and force, in the brief introduction, *largo maestoso*. One is struck at once by the efficiency of the means employed to create a mood so authentically expressive of the governing idea of the work. The music drives to the very heart of the subject: there is neither pose nor bombast in the presentation of the thought; and this attitude is maintained throughout—in the ingratiating loveliness of the second subject, in the fierce striving of the middle section, in the noble and sombre slow movement,—a *largo* of profound pathos and dignity,—and in the potently

* Published in 1893 as opus 45.

dramatic and impassioned close (the scherzo is, I think, less good). Of this final *allegro* an exposition has been vouchsafed. While in the preceding movements, it is said, he aimed at expressing tragic details, in the last he has tried to generalise. He wished "to heighten the darkness of tragedy by making it follow closely on the heels of triumph. Therefore, he attempted to make the last movement a steadily progressive triumph, which, at its close, is utterly broken and shattered, thinking that the most poignant tragedy is that of catastrophe in the hour or triumph. . . . In doing this he has tried to epitomise the whole work." The meaning of the *coda* is thus made clear: a climax approached with the utmost pomp and brilliancy, and cut short by a *precipitato* descent in octaves, *fff*, ending with a reminiscence of the portentous subject of the introduction. It is a profoundly moving conclusion to a noble work—a work which Mr. James Huneker has not extravagantly called "the most marked contribution to solo sonata literature since Brahms' F-minor piano sonata"; yet it is not so fine a work as any one of the three sonatas which MacDowell has since written. The style evinces, for the first time in his piano music, the striking orchestral character of his thought—yet the writing is not, paradoxical as it may seem, unpianistic. The suggestion of orchestral requirements is contained in the massiveness of the harmonic texture, and in the cumulative effect of the climaxes and crescendi. He conveys an impression of extended tone-spaces, of

Sonata Progress

largo con Maestri.

III

ten.

Forward the front of 45.

The image displays a handwritten musical score for a piece titled "Sonata Progress". The score is written on two systems of staves. The first system consists of two staves, with the upper staff containing a melodic line and the lower staff providing harmonic support. The second system also consists of two staves, continuing the musical development. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings such as "f" (forte) and "ff" (fortissimo). There are also some handwritten annotations and corrections throughout the score, including a "ten." marking and a "Forward the front of 45." note. The overall style is that of a working manuscript, with some ink bleed-through visible from the reverse side of the paper.

FACSIMILE OF A PORTION OF THE MS. OF THE "SONATA TRAGICA."

a largeness, complexity, and solidity of structure, which are peculiar to his own music, and which presupposes a rather disdainful view of the limitations of mere strings and hammers; yet it is all playable: its demands are formidable, but not impossible.

In 1895 MacDowell published his "Sonata Eroica" (Opus 50), and those who had wondered how he could better his performance in the "Tragica" received a fresh demonstration of the vitality of his gifts. For these sonatas of his constitute an ascending series, steadily progressive in excellence of substance and workmanship. They are, on the whole, I think it will be determined, his most significant and important contribution to musical art. The "Eroica" bears the motto, "Flos regum Arthuris," and as a further index to its content MacDowell has given this explanation: "While not exactly programme music,"* he says, "I had in mind the Arthurian legend when writing this work. The first movement typifies the coming of Arthur. The scherzo was suggested by a picture of Doré showing a knight in the woods surrounded by elves. The third movement was suggested by my idea of Guinevere. That following represents the passing

* It must be confessed that this qualification is a little difficult to grasp. Is not the sonata dependent for its complete understanding upon a knowledge of its literary basis? MacDowell exhibits here the half-heartedness which I have elsewhere remarked in his attitude toward representative music.

of Arthur." In his music he has been not only faithful to his text, he has illuminated it. Indeed, I think it would be not extravagant to say that he has given us here the noblest musical incarnation of the Arthurian legend which we have. It is singular, by the way, how frequently one is impelled to use the epithet "noble" in praising MacDowell's work; in reference to the "Sonata Eroica" it has an emphatic aptness, for nobility is the keynote of this music. If the sonata, as a whole, has not the dynamic power of the "Tragica," the weight and gravity of substance, it is both a lovelier and a more lovable work, and it is everywhere more significantly accented. He has written nothing more luxuriantly beautiful than the "Guinevere" movement, nothing more elevated and ecstatic than the apotheosis which ends the work. The diction throughout is richer and more variously contrasted than in the earlier work, and his manipulation of the form is more fluent and elastic.

Apparent as is the advance of the "Eroica" over its predecessor, the difference between these and the two later sonatas—the "Norse" and the "Keltic"—is even more marked. The first of these, the "Norse" sonata (Opus 57) appeared five years after the publication of the "Eroica." In the interval he had put forth the "Woodland Sketches," the "Sea Pieces," and three song groups; and he had, evidently, examined deeply into the resources and potentialities of his art. He had hitherto done nothing quite like these two later sonatas; they are

based upon larger and more intricate plans than their predecessors, are more determined and confident in their expression of personality, riper in style and far freer in form : they are, in fact, MacDowell at his most salient and distinguished.† He has placed these lines of his own on the first page of the score of the "Norse" (which is dedicated to Edvard Grieg) :

"Night had fallen on a day of deeds.
The great rafters in the red-ribbed hall
Flashed crimson in the fitful flame
Of smouldering logs.
And from the stealthy shadows
That crept 'round Harald's throne,
Rang out a Skald's strong voice,
With tales of battles won ;
Of Gudrun's love
And Sigurd, Siegmund's son."

Here, evidently, is a subject after his own heart, presenting such opportunities as he is at his happiest in improving—and he has improved them magnificently. The spaciousness of the plan, the boldness of the drawing, the fulness and intensity of the colour scheme, engage one's attention at the start. He has indulged almost to its extreme limits his predilection for extended chord formations and for phrases of heroic span—witness, for example, almost the whole of the first movement. The pervading quality of the musical thought is of a resistless and passionate virility. It is steeped in the barbaric and splendid atmosphere of the sagas. There are pages of epical

breadth and power, passages of elemental vigour and ferocity—passages, again, of an exquisite tenderness and poignancy. Of the three movements which the work comprises, the first makes the most lasting impression, although the second (the slow movement) has a haunting subject, which is recalled episodically in the final movement in a passage of unforgettable beauty and character.

With the publication, in 1901, of the "Keltic" sonata (his fourth, opus 59),* MacDowell achieved a conclusive and emphatic demonstration of his capacity as a creative musician of unquestionable importance. Not before had he given us so convincing an earnest of the larger aspect of his genius: neither in the three earlier sonatas, in the "Sea Pieces," nor in the "Indian" suite, had he attained an equal magnitude, an equal scope and significance. This is unquestionably his masterpiece. Nowhere else in his work are the distinguishing traits of his genius so strikingly disclosed—the breadth and reach of imagination, the magnetic vitality, the richness and fervour, the conquering poetic charm. Here you will find "the beauty of the men that take up spears and die for a name," no less than "the beauty of the poets that take up harp and sorrow and the wandering road"—a harp shaken with a wild and piercing music, a sorrow that is not of to-day, but of a past when dreams were actual and imperishable, and men lived the tales of beauty and of wonder which now are but a discredited and fading memory.

* Dedicated, like the "Norse," to Grieg.

It was a fortunate, if not an inevitable, event, in view of his temperamental affiliations with the Celtic genius, that MacDowell should have been made aware of the suitability for musical treatment of the ancient heroic chronicles of the Gaels, and that he should have gone for his inspiration, in particular, to the legends comprised in the famous Cycle of the Red Branch,—that wonderful group of epics which comprises, among other tales, the story of the matchless Deirdré—whose loveliness was such, so say the chroniclers, that “not upon the ridge of earth was there a woman so beautiful,”—and the life and adventures and magnificent death of the incomparable Cuchullin. These two kindred legends MacDowell has welded into a coherent and satisfying whole. He has aimed to make his music, he says, “more a commentary on the subject than an actual depiction of it”; but the case would be stated more precisely, I think, if one were to say that he has penetrated to the heart of the entire body of legends, has imbued himself with their ultimate spirit and significance, and has bodied it forth in his music with superb and irresistible eloquence.

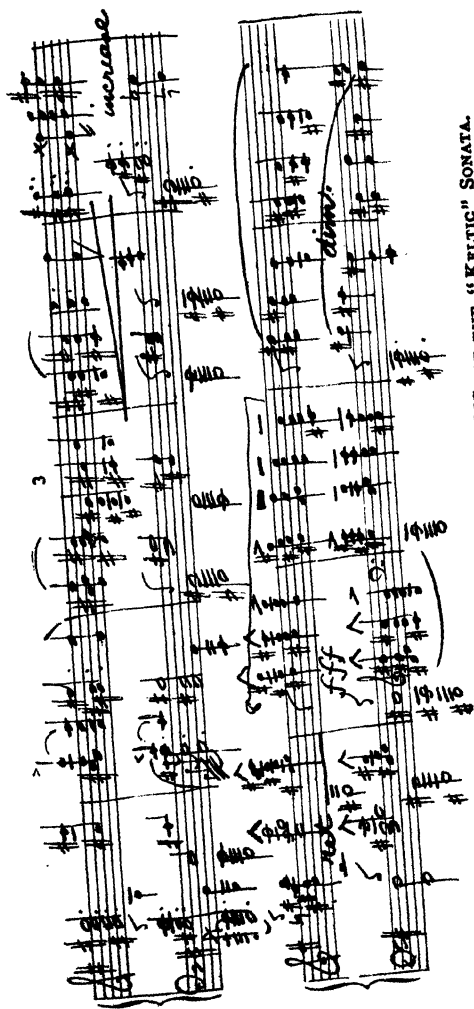
In a verse with which he prefixes the sonata he gives this index to its poetic content :

“Who minds now Keltic tales of yore,
Dark druid rhymes that thrall,
Deirdré's song and wizard lore
Of great Cuchullin's fall.”

He has attempted no mere musical recounting of

those romances of the ancient Gaelic world at which he hints in these lines. It would be juster to say, rather, that he has recalled in his music the very life and presence of the Gaelic prime—that he has “unbound the Island harp.” Above all, he has achieved that “heroic beauty” which, believes Mr. Yeats, has been fading out of the arts since “that decadence we call progress set voluptuous beauty in its place”—that heroic beauty which is of the very essence of the imaginative life of the primitive Celts, and which the Celtic “revival” in contemporary letters has so singularly failed to revive. For it is, I repeat, the heroic Gaelic world that MacDowell has made to live again in his music : that miraculous world of stupendous passions and aspirations, of bards and heroes and sublime adventure—the world, of Cuchullin the Unconquerable, and Laeg, and Queen Meave ; of Naesi, and Deirdré the Beautiful, and Fergus, and Connla the Harper, and those kindred figures, lovely or greatly tragical, that are like no other figures in the world’s mythologies.

Deirdré he has realised exquisitely in his middle movement : that is her image, in all its fragrant and haunting loveliness. MacDowell has limned her musically in a manner worthy of comparison with the sumptuous pen-portrait of her in Standish O’Grady’s “Cuculain” : “a woman of wondrous beauty, bright gold her hair, eyes piercing and splendid, tongue full of sweet sounds, her countenance like the colour of snow blended with crimson.” In the close of the last movement we are justified in



FACSIMILE OF A PASSAGE FROM THE ORIGINAL MS. OF THE "KELTIC" SONATA.

tracing an emotional portrayal of the sublime tradition of Cuchullin's death, the manner of which is thus described by Standish O'Grady : "Cuculain sprang forth, but as he sprang, Lewy MacConroi pierced him through the bowels. Then fell the great hero of the Gael. Thereat the sun darkened, and the earth trembled . . . when, with a crash, fell that pillar of heroism, and that flame of the warlike valour of Erin was extinguished . . . Then Cuculain, raising his eyes, saw thence northwards from the lake a tall pillar-stone, the grave of a warrior slain there in some ancient war. With difficulty he reached it, and he leaned awhile against the pillar, for his mind wandered, and he knew nothing for a space. After that he took off his brooch, and removing the torn bratta [girdle], he passed it round the top of the pillar, where there was an indentation in the stone, and passed the ends under his arms and around his breast, tying with languid hands a loose knot, which soon was made fast by the weight of the dying hero ; thus they beheld him standing with the drawn sword in his hand, and the rays of the setting sun bright on his panic-striking helmet. So stood Cuculain, even in death-pangs, a terror to his enemies, for a deep spring of stern valour was opened in his soul, and the might of his unfathomable spirit sustained him. Thus perished Cuculain . . ."

Superb as this is, it is paralleled by MacDowell's tone picture. That, for nobility of conception, for majestic solemnity and pathos, is a musical

performance which, I am tempted to believe, measures up to the level of superlative achievements. The representation, throughout, is spiritually informed. "All evil passions may obtain there, but they move against a spiritual background of pathetic wonder, of tragic beauty and tragic fate," as Fiona Macleod has observed of the poetry of her race. ". . . The vision of beautiful life is the vision of life seen not in impossible unrelief but in possible relief; of harmonious unity in design as well as in colour." The "Keltic" sonata carries this high message of ultimate fulfilment—a message that is not less majestic and luminous because it is in no way avowed. In the splendid serenity of the end, there is disclosed, if there be the vision to divine it, a spiritual message as large and virile as it is profoundly and nobly just.

CHAPTER VII

THE SONGS

ANY one who should undertake casually to examine MacDowell's songs *seriatim*, beginning with his earliest listed work in this form—the "Two Old Songs," opus 9—would not improbably be struck by an apparent lack of continuity and logic in the initial stages of his artistic development. At first glance, MacDowell seems to have compassed a phenomenal ripeness and individuality of expression in these songs, which head the catalogue of his published works, whereas the five songs of opus 11 and 12 are conventional and unimportant. The explanation, which I have elsewhere intimated, is simple. The songs of opus 11 and 12, issued in 1883, were the first of his *Lieder* to appear in print ; the songs numbered opus 9, which would appear to antedate them in composition and publication, were not written until a decade later, when they were issued under an arbitrary opus number as a matter of expediency. Their proper place in MacDowell's musical history is, therefore, about synchronous with the mature and characteristic "Eight Songs" of opus 47. From the

five songs now published in one volume as opus 11 and 12, the progress of MacDowell's art as a song writer is both steady and intelligible.

He has not been especially prolific in this field, when one thinks of Grieg's one hundred and twenty songs, and of Brahms' one hundred and ninety-six ; not to mention Schumann's two hundred and forty-eight, or Schubert's amazing six hundred and over. MacDowell has written forty-two songs for single voice and piano, together with a number of ingenious and effective pieces for men's voices and for mixed chorus. That his songs, as a whole, are comparable in inherent artistic consequence with his sonatas, or with such things as the "Woodland Sketches," the "Sea Pieces," and the "New England Idyls," I sincerely doubt,* although I readily grant the beauty and fascination of many passages, and of certain pages in which he is incontestably at the height of his powers. Here, as in his writing for piano and for orchestra, you will find abundant evidence of his distinguishing traits—sensitiveness and fervour of imagination, a lovely and intimate sense of romance, whimsical and piquant humour, virility, penetrating passion, an unerring instinct for atmospheric verity.

* Mr. Henry T. Finck, who is a staunch and persuasive advocate of MacDowell as a song writer, cannot accuse me of "Jumboism"—as he likes to call that principle of artistic valuation which estimates a work of art according to its bulk ; for I place among the most important of MacDowell's productions several of the shortest of the "Sea Pieces" and "New England Idyls."

But too frequently, as it seems to me, he sacrifices truth of declamation to the presumed requirements of melodic design, and he seems at times to pay more heed to the unrelated effect of tonal contours than to the dramatic or emotional needs of his subject. As an instance of his not infrequent indifference to justness of declamatory utterance, examine the rhythmical articulation of the words, "when Nature all is sad like me," at the bottom of the first page of "Menie" (opus 34); * notice also his setting of "in those brown eyes," at the bottom of the last page of "Confidence" (opus 47), and of the word "without" in the fourth bar of "Tyrant Love" (opus 60). I dwell upon this point, not in any spirit of captiousness, I need scarcely say, but because it exemplifies a persistent characteristic of MacDowell's style as a song writer.

Of that other trait to which I have referred—his not exceptional pre-occupation with a purely musical plan at the expense of dramatic and emotional congruity—the attentive observer will not want for examples in almost any of MacDowell's song-groups. As a single instance, I may allege the run in eighth-notes which encumbers the setting of the second syllable of the word "again," in the fourth bar of "Springtide" (opus

* I agree with Mr. Finck, who greatly admires this passage, that the harmonic effect of the accompanying chords is both apt and beautiful; but I submit that the rhythmical design of the vocal phrase is, from the standpoint of correct declamation, decidedly wanting in felicity.

60). Such infelicities are difficult to account for in the work of a musician so exceedingly sensitive in matters of poetic fitness as he. It may be that his acute sense of dramatic and emotional values operates perfectly only when he is unhampered by the thought of the voice. For it is difficult, after studying his songs, to escape the conclusion that he does not fuse the various elements in his lyrico-poetic schemes with entire success. There is an apparent contradiction of this view to be found in the fact that in almost all of his songs the voice is predominant over the piano part—although he is far, indeed, from writing mere accompaniments: ~~the~~ support which he gives the voice is consistently articulate and important, for he brings to bear upon it all his rich resources of harmonic colour and significance. But though he makes the voice the paramount element, he uses it, in general, rather as a vehicle for the unconscious exposition of a determined lyricism than as an undeviating instrument of emotional utterance. When one thinks of how Hugo Wolf, for example, or Debussy, would have treated the phrase, "to wake again the bitter joy of love," in "Fair Springtide," it will be felt, I think, that MacDowell's setting leaves something to be desired on the score of emotional verity, although the song, as a whole, is admirable—one of the loveliest and most spontaneous he has written. I do not mean to say that he does not often achieve an ideal correspondence between the significance of his text and the effect of his music ;

MACDOWELL AT THE PIANO
From a Portrait painted by Ben-El-Mechaie



but when he does—as in, for instance, that superb tragedy in little, “The Sea,”* or in the still finer “Sunrise”†—one’s impression is that it is the fortunate result of chance, rather than the outcome of deliberate artistic purpose. It is in songs of an untrammelled lyricism that his method finds its chief opportunity. In such he is both delightful and satisfying—in, for instance, the six flower songs, “From An Old Garden”; in “Confidence” and “In the Woods” (opus 47); in “The Swan bent low to the Lily,” “A Maid Sings Light,” and “Long Ago” (opus 56); and in the delectable “To the Golden Rod,” from his latest song group (opus 60). This is music of blithe and captivating allurements, of grave or riant tenderness, of compelling fascination; and in it, the word and the tone are ideally mated. Yet even in others of his songs in which they do not so consistently correspond, one must acknowledge gladly the beauty and persuasiveness of the music itself: such music as he has given us in “Constancy” (opus 58), in “As the gloaming Shadows creep” (opus 56), in “Fair Springtide”—which represent his ripest utterances as a song writer. If he is not, in this particular form, quite at his happiest, he is among the foremost of those who have kept alive in the modern tradition the conception of the song as a medium of lyric utterance no less than of precise dramatic signification.

* No. VII. of the “Eight Songs,” opus 47.

† Opus 58, No. 2.

CHAPTER VIII

MACDOWELL TO-DAY— A SUMMARY

THE "Keltic" sonata was, as I have indicated, the consummation of an evolution—gradual, but sure and constant—toward the acme of powerful expression. It is cast in a mould essentially heroic ; it has its moods of tenderness, of insistent sweetness, but these are incidental : the governing mood is signified in the tremendous exordium with which the work opens, and in the authentic majesty of the close. Let me trace what seems to my thinking a development along somewhat different lines in what MacDowell has produced since the issue of the "Keltic" in 1901.

In the "Three Songs," opus 60, which followed the sonata a year later, he has said nothing that he had not, in slightly varying form, said before. So I shall consider rather the two later volumes of poetic piano studies*—the " Fireside Tales," opus 61, and the "New England Idyls," opus 62, in which a new note, a new emotion is declared.

* Published in 1902.

At the very start, on the first page of "An Old Love Story,"* does it not seem as if MacDowell's voice had taken on an unfamiliar timbre?—is there not here an accent, a turn of phrase, a quality of sentiment, which are notably fresh and strange? Is there not in this, and in "By Smouldering Embers;" in the "Mid-Winter," "With Sweet Lavender," and "From a Log Cabin," of the "New England Idyls,"—is there not here, along with the old verve, a graver tenderness, a pervasive sobriety—may one say a more penetrant humanity? Read over the D-flat major section of "An Old Love Story." Throughout MacDowell's previous work one will find no passage quite like it in contour and emotion. It is quieter, more ripely poised, than anything in his earlier manner that I can recall; and what a profound and lingering pathos he has uttered in those last ten bars! "Of Br'er Rabbit," "From a German Forest,"—a richly poetic fantasy,— "Of Salamanders," and "A Haunted House," are in his familiar vein; but again the new note is sounded in the concluding number of the book, "By Smouldering Embers."

In the "New England Idyls" the point is still more evident. One passes over "From an Old Garden" and "Midsummer" as belonging fundamentally to the period of the "Woodland Sketches" and "Sea Pieces"—abundant in beauty and poetic suggestion as they are. But one halts at "Mid-Winter," No. 3 of the collection; with those fifteen

* The first of the "Fireside Tales."

bars in E-flat major in the middle section, one enters upon unfamiliar ground in the various and delectable region of MacDowell's fantasy. So in the succeeding piece, "With Sweet Lavender" : he has not given us in any of his former writing a theme similar in construction to the one with which he begins the thirteenth bar, a harmonisation conveying precisely that atmosphere. "In Deep Woods" is less unusual—is, in fact, strongly suggestive, in harmonic colour, of the vivid sonorities of the "Wandering Iceberg" study in the "Sea Pieces." The "Indian Idyl," "To an Old White Pine," and "From Puritan Days" are also contrived in the familiarly persuasive idiom of the earlier volumes, although unfailingly resourceful in invention and imaginative vigour. In "From a Log Cabin," though, we come upon as surprising a thing as MacDowell's art has yielded us since the appearance of the "Woodland Sketches." I doubt if, in the entire body of his writing, you will find a lovelier, a more intimate utterance. His "log cabin" is, one may imagine, a signature of that inner citadel of aspiration which holds one knows not what of fervour and enchantment :

" A house of dreams untold,
It looks out over the whispering tree-tops
And faces the setting sun,"

is his word for it, and how finely poetic is its musical reflection ! The keenness of emotion, the tonal richness and sonority, the pliant firmness of struc-

ture, we had known before : the spiritual substance is of a different order. Here is a mood subtly yet arrestingly individual ; Schumann-like in its intense sincerity of impulse, yet with an urge, a magic, a passionate fulness and ardour not elsewhere precisely to be paralleled. If MacDowell has written anything lovelier in shape and colour, more perfect in its emotional correspondence, than the second page of this study, I should not know where to look for it. Nor is it, I think, to be found in his work ; for not alone that passage, but the entire piece, utters a new mood, is steeped in a new atmosphere, is the issue of an inspiration more profoundly contemplative than any to which he had hitherto responded.

The MacDowell of to-day, then, is an artistic figure of commanding stature—a musical creator who has brought to an impressive development a singular gift of beautiful and forceful utterance. His chief claim to perpetuity is, I think it will be found, that he has awakened in music that sense of the invisible, of the hidden wonder and enchantment behind the manifest presences of the world, which it is the signal privilege of the Celtic imagination to discover and enforce. He has evoked an incalculable spell, has opened a door into a new and shining world. That, I believe, is what is essential and individual in his art : the disclosure of an immemorial magic in familiar things.

EDWARD MACDOWELL'S WORKS

OPUS

9. Two Old Songs.
10. Suite : piano.
11. } Album of five songs.
12. }
13. Prelude and fugue : piano.
14. Second suite : piano.
15. Concerto No. 1 : piano with orchestra.
16. Serenata : piano.
17. Two fantastic pieces : piano.
18. Barcarolle and Humoresque : piano.
19. Forest Idyls : piano.
20. Three Poems : piano, four hands.
21. Moon pictures : piano, four hands.
22. Hamlet and Ophelia : orchestra.
23. Concerto No. 11 : piano with orchestra.
24. Four compositions : piano.
25. Lancelot and Elaine : orchestra.
26. From an Old Garden : songs.
27. Three songs : male voices.
28. Six Idyls : piano.
29. The Saracens and Lovely Alda : orchestra.
30. Six Poems : piano.
31. Four Little Poems : piano.
32. Three songs.
33. Two songs.
34. Romance ; 'cello with orchestral accompaniment.
35. Concert Study : piano.

OPUS

- 37. Les Orientales : piano.
- 38. Marionettes : piano.
- 39. Twelve Studies : piano.
- 40. Six Love Songs.
- 41. Two songs : male voices.
- 42. Suite No. 1 : orchestra.
- 42A. In October: orchestra.
- 43. Two Northern Songs : male voices.
- 44. Barcarolle : male voices.
- 45. Sonata Tragica : piano.
- 46. Virtuoso-studies : piano.
- 47. Eight songs.
- 48. Suite No. 2 (Indian) : orchestra.
- 49. Air et Rigaudon : piano.
- 50. Sonata No. 2 (Eroica) : piano.
- 51. Woodland Sketches, piano.
- 52. Three songs : male voices.
- 53. Two songs : male voices.
- 54. Two songs : male voices.
- 55. Sea Pieces : piano.
- 56. Four songs.
- 57. Third Sonata (Norse) : piano.
- 58. Three songs.
- 59. Fourth Sonata (Keltic) : piano.
- 60. Three songs.
- 61. Fireside Tales : piano.
- 62. New England Idyls : piano.

WITHOUT OPUS NUMBER:

Two songs from the thirteenth century : male voices.

00122

00122

